

Message Text

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47

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

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PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SAB-01 /052 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5482

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MEXICO CITY IMMEDIATE

PANCANAL

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 6377

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR

SUBJECT: NATIONAL GUARD G-3 LT. COL. CONTRERAS VISITS CUBA

REF: PANAMA 4580

SUMMARY: GUARDIA NACIONAL G-3 LT. COL. ARMANDO CONTRERAS LEFT FOR CUBA EVENING OCTOBER 16. HIS VISIT, AS REPORTED IN PANAMA CITY PRESS WILL SERVE TO "STRENGTHEN FRATERNAL CUBAN-PANAMANIAN MILITARY TIES". CONTRERAS AND HIS PARTY WILL BE GIVEN ARMS DEMONSTRATION IN CUBA. EMBASSY MILGP OFFICER WHO SPOKE WITH CONTRERAS ON OCT. 10 SAID THAT CONTRERAS GAVE NO INDICATION THAT HE PLANNED TO BUY ARMS AT THIS TIME. WE BELIEVE VISITS PRIMARY PURPOSE IS TO BOLSTER TORRIJOS' SAGGING REVOLUTIONARY IMAGE AND STEM EROSION OF LEFTIST SUPPORT FOR HIS REGIME. END SUMMARY.

1. OCT. 16 LOCAL PRESS GAVE STRAIGHTFORWARD ACCOUNT OF DEPARTURE FOR CUBA BY NATIONAL GUARD (GN) G-3 LT. COL. ARMANDO CONTRERAS. CONTRERAS LEFT FOR HAVANA LAST NIGHT ACCOMPANIED BY CAPT. SANTIAGO FUNDORA, OF THE PANAMANIAN AIR FORCE, AND BY LT. DANIEL DELGADO, LT. GERMAN
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GONZALEZ PITY, AND SECOND LT. LUIS DELGADO. SUBSE-

QUENT COMMENTARY OCTOBER 17 IN "MATUTINO" EDITORIAL MADE ALLUSIONS TO PRESSURES EXERTED BY STRONG COUNTRIES OVER WEAK COUNTRIES TO PREVENT THEM FROM OBTAINING NECESSARY SUPPLIES.

2. WHILE OFFICIALLY-STATED PURPOSE OF VISIT IS TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONS BETWEEN PANAMANIAN AND CUBAN MILITARY, EMBASSY KNOWS CONTRERAS WILL VIEW DEMONSTRATIONS OF WIDE ARRAY OF SOVIET ARMS BY CUBAN MILITARY FORCES.

3. DURING RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH MILGP OFFICER, CONTRERAS SAID HE WAS TRAVELING TO CUBA AT CUBAN INVITATION TO VISIT MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, SEE MILITARY EXERCISES AND OBSERVE ARMS DEMONSTRATIONS (SEE FBIS PANAMA PA 1522356). HE GAVE NO INDICATION OF ANY PLANS TO BUY ARMS. HE MENTIONED IT WAS A CHANCE TO COMPARE SOVIET-MADE ARMS WITH US ARMS HE HAS BEEN SHOWN HERE.

4. DURING PAST SIXTY DAYS CONTRERAS HAS TWICE MADE QUERIES TO MILGP ABOUT US WILLINGNESS TO SELL ARMS TO PANAMA. MILGP GAVE ENCOURAGING RESPONSE, BUT WITHOUT ANY DEFINITE COMMITMENT.

5. COMMENT: IN PANAMA'S VIEW IT HAD LITTLE TO LOSE BY ACCEPTING INVITATION TO CUBAN SHOW OF SOVIET ARMS. ITS LEADERS HAVE NOT FORESEEN THAT THIS VISIT MIGHT CAUSE AN ADVERSE REACTION IN US, BUT HAVE REGARDED VISIT AS A WAY OF SHORING UP TORRIJOS SAGGING IMAGE AS A REVOLUTIONARY. HIS OCTOBER 11 SPEECH CAME IN FOR STRONG CRITICISM FROM ULTRA-NATIONALISTS. HE HAS WITNESSED IN RECENT MONTHS THE GROWTH OF RADICAL ANTI-GOP STUDENT GROUPS AT EXPENSE OF THE MORE MODERATE PRO-GOP PANAMANIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS. PUBLICITY CONCERNING OFFICIAL GN VISIT TO CUBA MIGHT HELP STEM THE EROSION OF SUPPORT FOR TORRIJOS FROM THE LEFTIST PART OF HIS COALITION. WE OUGHT ALSO TO BEAR IN MIND, THAT PANAMA'S ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS WITH CUBA AND THE THIRD WORLD WERE PART OF ITS EFFORT

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TO ASSERT INDEPENDENCE AND BREAK ITS TRADITIONAL SELF-IMAGE AS A DEPENDENCY OF US. IN CARRYING ON PROTRACTED CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES--AS WILL BE NECESSARY DUE TO THE US ELECTIONS IN 1976--TORRIJOS MUST KEEP HIS REVOLUTIONARY IMAGE POLISHED AND HIS SUPPORT INTACT. PUBLICITY ON THE MISSION TO CUBA WILL BE ONE WAY OF DOING THIS. ALTHOUGH THE NATIONAL GUARD IS INTERESTED IN ACQUIRING

ADDITIONAL ARMS (SEE REFTTEL), WE DO NOT BELIEVE
THE VISIT TO CUBA WILL RESULT IN AN ARMS
PURCHASE. OUR VIEW IS THAT THIS VISIT IS DESIGNED
PRIMARILY FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSUMPTION.
JORDEN

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